1: Rosen E-5 (1901-1902) 1924 SK6 Choroti SK6

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Fig. 80. Woman taking lice from her husband's head. Choroti on their wandering towards the Pilcomayo. Dry soil forest region between Caiza and Fort Crevaux, Gran Chaco, Bolivia. Photo, E. v. K.

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equipment in large carrying-nets and bags; at such times the men march along unburdened, carrying in their hands only bow and arrows. This is, however, easily accounted for, as on the trek the men have always to be prepared to kill game for procuring food. If they, like the women, were hampered by heavy loads, they would practically have no chance at all of taking a ready arrow-shot at game encountered on the march. 462

I never once saw grown women amusing themselves with any games or sports, whereas this is frequently the case with the men. The chief occupations of the latter consist of hunting, fishing, the gathering of wild honey and the manufacturing of various weapons and implements (see the above table of division of labour as between the sexes). The men give considerably less time to actual labour than the women, and to me it seemed as if the life of Choroti wives was hard and laborious, whilst that of the men, as a rule, was pretty light and easy-going.

Nevertheless, the men are by no means hard or cruel to their wives, and it appeared to me as if the women took it as a matter of course that they had to work for their husbands and children in the way they did, and, generally speaking, they seemed quite content with their lot in life. Indeed, I noticed many instances of real domestic happiness. 593

Parents bear great love to their children. These, when quite small, are carried by their mothers in a broad strip, or piece, of cloth in the way fig. 180 shows. The Choroti do not have many children; it is only seldom that the number of children exceeds four. According to Nordenskiöld, they are given names only when old enough to answer to them. The same author has noted down the following Choroti names, of which the first three are men's names, and the remainder women's names: Yóseliancé (the killer of foxes), Hotenic (Mataco), Éstiáhua (a gallinaceous bird), Hayku (not sweet), Kosoki (suffering from skin eruptions), Aséshnialo (women in plenty).[1] [854] [462] [551] [553]

Parental authority does not amount to much, and actual bringing up and discipline is entirely out of the question. In cases where parents attain so great an age that they become irksome to their children, it is not unknown for the latter to kill them. Nordenskiöld's interpreter, Flores, once witnessed a Choroti man burning an old and decrepit woman alive. Old men and women, who are suspected of working evil by witchcraft, are sometimes burned alive, and therefore it is possible that belief in the 888 754 683

[1] Nordenskiöld (13), p. 85.

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Fig. 180. Husband and wife, with baby. Choroti. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. Photo. E. v. R.

supernatural, of some kind or other, plays a leading part when children kill their aged parent.

Every village is ruled by a chief or headman. According to the observations of some investigators, these headmen do not nowadays possess any great power or authority, but among the Choroti whom I visited in 1901, the chief's authority was by no means inconsiderable. For example, it only needed my arranging with him that the Indians were to carry out a certain piece of work, and the work would be done. For the work performed by the Indians I paid the chief in goods, which he allotted among them as he himself thought fit, as it appeared. In war, each village contingent is under the leadership of their headman. It was stated by the soldiers of Fort Crevaux that all Choroti used to be under a paramount chief, whose authority over all the other chiefs principally consisted in his being entitled to taking chief command in war. The office of village headman as a rule descends from father to son.

That certain Choroti chiefs used to be held in greater respect than others was made evident to us at a visit we made to a sugar plantation on our return journey to Salta. A large number of Choroti had just then

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7
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very qualities which the Indians appreciate in their leaders. He was valiant, cunning, and eloquent, and, being a great warrior, had provided his people with firearms which made the Tobas superior in war to all other Chaco tribes and dangerous enemies even to the whites.

The Eakachi, as is customary in the Chaco, hold their assemblies under a shady algaroba tree, generally at the time of the new moon. Besides watching the conduct of their chiefs, they have to deliberate questions of war and peace and to appoint an extraordinary chief when an attack against an enemy is planned. In addition, they act as judges or arbitrators in quarrels and fights between the men.

A social feature characteristic of all Chaco tribes is the relative matriarchy or »mother-right» prevailing among them. Descent is traced through the female, the child being supposed to belong to the mother's, and not to the father's, tribe or clan. Closely connected with this idea is the custom prevailing among most matriarchal peoples, that when a man marries, he stays with his wife's family, becoming a member of her clan. All these features are found among the Pilcomayo tribes, but particularly among the *Choroti* where »mother-right» has developed into real mother-rule. Thus in those parts of the Choroti country where they are neighbours with other tribes and intermarriage takes place, it is the rule that if the woman is of the Choroti tribe the children become members of that tribe, whereas, if a Choroti man marries a woman of another tribe, he himself and the children become members of that tribe. This was particularly noticeable in regard to the Ashluslay in the South with whom the Choroti frequently intermarry. Thus the »great chief» of the Choroti living near the fort Guachalla, the old Atamo, was on his father's side of Ashluslay descent, but his mother being a Choroti woman he had himself become a Choroti.

The »mother-right» of the Choroti is not carried to such an extreme that for instance the maternal uncle or some other relative on the mother's side is regarded as the guardian of the children. Among the Choroti both parents are the guardians of the child although, as in other matters, the mother has always more to say. Nor does it imply that parentage is wholly attributed to the mother. On the contrary, the custom of couvade, as it is observed by the Choroti, shows that this maternal people is well aware of the father's great rôle in the procreation of children. The »mother-right» of the Choroti and of other Chaco tribes is in fact only a secondary phenomenon, evidently dependent on the social conditions which have developed among the tribes in this country, and which in their turn

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco/SI7

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CHAPTER IV.

Courtship and marriage.

A salient feature in the social life of all Chaco tribes, and one in which they differ considerably from the tribes whom I learned to know in tropical South America, is the great sexual liberty allowed to young people before marriage. As soon as a girl has passed her first menstruation she is considered free to choose for herself occasional lovers, and generally she does not delay in making use of this right. This free sexual life is particularly indulged in during the algaroba season, in connection with the feasts and dances which then take place. The girls avoid the natural consequences of this sexual license by abortion or infanticide, customs which are also approved by the social morality of the Chaco Indians. Having enjoyed this free life for some years, the girl ultimately decides to marry, and then as a rule becomes a faithful wife as long as the husband does not himself neglect his duties towards her. This general state of things is met with all along the Pilcomayo, although customs of course differ to some extent in different tribes. I shall first relate the customs practised among the Choroti in courtship and marriage.

The *Choroti* are a strictly monogamous people. During my stay among the different Choroti tribes I never found a single case of polygamy, and I was moreover able to confirm that polygamy is strongly disapproved of by custom and the social morality of the people. It is first of all rendered impossible by the jealousy of the women who, as I have mentioned before, have a decisive influence in matters of love and take the first step towards contracting marriage.

Courtship therefore among the Choroti assumes rather a peculiar form, inasmuch as the girls play the active, and the young men the passive part. Marriages are as a rule contracted during the algaroba season from November to March, when there is a good supply of food in the villages and

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

Choroti SK 6

C 581 584 or whom she only wants for a temporary lover. Above all she wants as a husband a man who treats her well and possesses the qualities necessary to support the future family. Since the Choroti to a great extent live by fishing, skill in this art is naturally reckoned among a man's most praiseworthy qualities. Importance is also attached to skill in gardening and hunting. Consequently, when a young man is courting a girl, he tries to gain her favour by presenting her with fish in abundance. I was told that when several men are courting the same girl — which naturally is often the case — the man who brought her the largest quantities of fish had the greatest chance of gaining preference.

C 581 593 Thus among the Choroti, marriage is from a man's point of view an important matter. When the parents send out their young son to take part in the dances and to find a wife, they follow his undertaking with the keenest interest. Every evening the father shakes his magical rattle gourd (*pelite*) in order to promote his son's enterprise and »hurry on» the girls on his behalf. When the rattle gourd is used for such practical purposes the ceremony is called *nekeñlitse símä*, which literally means: »to shake the rattle to get (or obtain) something».

C 585 Apart from these ceremonies in connection with courtship, there are no particular marriage rites, except the necessary drinking-bout which accompanies all family feasts and in which only the men take part. The young couple are without any further ceremony regarded as married, but marriage is not fully complete until a child is born.

M [471] [562] 527 836 584 Among the *Mataco*, marriages are not particularly contracted in connection with the dances, but conditions are the same as among the Choroti in so far as the women play the active part both as concerns incidental amorous relations and marriages proper. The great drinking-feasts during the algaroba season are the occasions when a woman enters into temporary or permanent relation with a man. When the men are intoxicated, the girls avail themselves of the opportunity, seize the youths whom they like by the hands and take them to their houses where they spend the night with them. These liaisons lead in many cases to real marriages.

M 585 789 535 When marriage is agreed upon, it is celebrated with the usual ceremonies which have a religious significance. The drum, the most important magical instrument of the Mataco, is beaten the whole night with a view to keeping off evil spirits from the couple. Similarly, a ceremonial dance, called *Nahútsak*, is performed in the evening. It is a ring-dance much like the marriage dance *Avúshe* of the Choroti. The couple being married are seated in the middle of the ring and their friends dance and chant around

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7
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casually committed with another man rarely caused him to divorce his wife; divorce took place only when she continued to maintain illicit relations with other men. The fact that among the Tobas polygamy is sanctioned by custom seems to have a tendency to make matrimonial unions looser than among the monogamous Choroti. But in all tribes the rule is that marriage lasts for life.

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If the women in general seemed to be more faithful in marriage than the men, this was in part due to the fact that in the former jealousy was

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Young Toba woman. Bolivian Chaco.

a very prominent quality. After the Choroti girl has made her choice of a partner, she faithfully keeps to him and jealously watches his conduct towards other women. If she suspects him of being unfaithful, she will soon remind him of his duty towards his own wife. If she discovers him in illicit practices, for instance in another man's house, or taking part in the dances, she at once seizes him by the hair and drags him to his own home. This is in fact the way in which the Choroti women generally treat their unfaithful husbands, that is to say, by seizing them by the long hair and taking them home. I never noticed that a man treated in this somewhat rough way made any resistance. The submissive attitude of

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco
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C 593 152 [691] the men in such cases showed to what extent the women dominate the home life of the Choroti. There is not, among these Indians, any punishment for adultery as such, for the very reason that punishment in any form is unknown within the tribe. — Among the Tobas again a man may beat his wife if she commits adultery.

C 578 152 On the other hand, if a Choroti woman gets to know of a female rival, the result will in all probability be a fight between the two women, who use a sort of boxing glove of hide, or small daggers consisting of the legbone of a deer pointed at the end. The same custom is followed by the Mataco and the Toba women, in whom jealousy is likewise a prominent quality. Among the Tobas particularly, fights between girls who have fallen in love with the same man are of frequent occurrence. Similarly, if a married woman gets to know that her husband maintains illicit relations with another woman, the consequence is in most cases a fight between the legitimate wife and the rival, and these fights are not seldom sanguinary. The one even tries to kill the other which, of course, she very seldom succeeds in doing. Such fights are continued for several hours, often for a whole night, during which the two enraged women beat each other with the hands, scratch each other with the nails, or wound each other with big cactus thorns which they have tied at the wrists.